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TEACHER AIDES UNDER GLASS.

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IN AN ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TEACHER AIDES, A UNIQUE PROJECT HAS BEEN UNDERTAKEN IN GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA, INVOLVING 3 EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS AND 14 TEACHER AIDES WHO PERFORM AS MANY CLERICAL, ADMINISTRATIVE, AND ROUTINE CLASSROOM DUTIES AS POSSIBLE WITHOUT ACTUALLY BECOMING INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF FORMAL INSTRUCTION. THREE ADDITIONAL SCHOOLS HAVE BEEN DESIGNATED FOR THE PURPOSE OF COMPARISON THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE STUDY. DURING THE 3 YEAR PROJECT, TEACHER AIDE EFFECTIVENESS WILL BE EVALUATED AS IT RELATES TO IMPROVED INSTRUCTION, THE TEACHER SHORTAGE, AND THE POTENTIAL USE OF AUXILIARY PERSONNEL BY THE CLASSROOM TEACHER. THESE EVALUATIONS WILL FACILITATE COMPARISONS WITH SELECTED SCHOOLS IN GEORGIA, FLORIDA, AND TENNESSEE WHICH CURRENTLY USE TEACHER AIDES IN RURAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS. THIS ARTICLE APPEARS IN "THE NORTH DAKOTA TEACHER", MARCH, 1968. (DA)

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TEACHER AIDES UNDER GLASS

Teacher Aides - how useful are they?

That's the reason for a unique Title III project underway this year in the Grand Forks school system. It is the only such project in the nation.

There was considerable head scratching when Supt. of Schools H. Edwin Cramer proposed his teacher aide evaluation project to federal officials. In fact, he was first told it would be an impossible task.

Impossible is a word Cramer likes, however, so he dug in all the harder and came up with a $70,000 grant, some willing administrators and teachers and the project now is in full swing.

It's a small project, involving only 14 teacher aides employed in three experimental schools. Three other Grand Forks schools were chosen for comparison purposes.

The purpose is not to train teacher aides but to measure the value of their use.

The experiment is a part of "The Teacher and His Staff Concept." The project has four objectives: (1) to accomplish improvement of instruction, (2) to attack the nationwide inadequacy of teacher supply, (3) to observe and evaluate potential of teachers to use other personnel, and (4) to publish results of the experiment.

Major problem is the actual process of evaluation. Some Grand Forks teachers in the comparison control schools where aides are not being used were less than happy to submit to lengthy initial testing as a part of the evaluation program.

Project Director Margaret Abbott and Edward F. Krahmer, director of the University of North Dakota's Bureau of Educational Research, both are confident useful evaluations can be made during the project's three-year duration. So far, all initial information from teachers, aides, administrators and students has been gathered for the evaluation process. More data will be gathered from this same group in addition to parents and other community leaders for final results. Krahmer also

RC 001436

explains that comparisons will be possible with certain schools where teacher aides are being used in rural area improvement projects now being conducted in Florida, Georgia and Tennessee.

All the evaluation data will be transferred with an optical scanner to IBM cards for ease of handling.

Convincing teachers to use the aides was the first big step, according to Mrs. Abbott, whose experience includes seven years as a teacher.

The need for aides is brought out in some surveys that indicate as much as one-fifth of the elementary school teacher's school day is consumed with clerical and other non-teacher duties.

In order to overcome and inability of teachers to work effectively with aides, principals in experiment schools started in the spring of 1967 to orientate teachers in the use of aides.

Actually, Mrs. Abbott said, "effective use of an aide calls for more planning and preparation on the part of the teacher. This is conducive to improvement of instruction, which in turn is the prime objective in the utilization of aides."

"While teacher aides augment the instructional program," she emphasizes, "the responsibility for classroom teaching remains with the classroom teachers. In other words," she says, "a teacher aide or clerk cannot conduct the instructional program in the classroom or elsewhere in the absence of the regular professional person."

The State Department of Public Instruction has a strict policy on the use of non-professional teacher aides and warns that foundation payments will not be made to schools employing uncertified persons in a teaching capacity.

The policy in part emphasizes, "It is understood that these 'helpers' would absorb only such duties and functions which do not, in themselves, get directly into the instructional process. They are in no way to replace teaching personnel required to teach students."

Four teacher aides in the Grand Forks project are considered clerical help and 10 are called teacher assistants.

Their duties include clerical, monitorial and housekeeping tasks, but one category of work is called "instructional support." This involves reading and telling stories, tutoring the individual child, conducting small group drills, assisting with direction of independent study and assisting with such lessons as art, music, physical education, arithmetic,

reading, science, health, social studies and language arts.

However, Mrs. Abbott said, "aides are always under direction of a teacher, aides take nothing upon themselves and the qualified teacher is always present. We are being very careful of this."

Probably the best indication of how the project is going so far comes in comments from teachers, aides and school administrators.

An aide: "This is fun. I am amazed and thrilled by the interest and ability of the small children. It makes me want to complete my training."

Said another: ". . . I do not feel the teachers are using us as much as they could. They do not seem to realize fully that we can be used."

A principal: "So far the aides have been very unselfish in the amount of extra time they spend. I find they become as intense about their work as do teachers. They often take work home. They read professional books and one even took a modern math course because she felt inadequate."

Another principal: "After observing 13 weeks of teacher aides in our school, I feel that they are needed - needed by the professionals and especially by the students. . ."

A teacher: "I have more time to spend on actual lesson preparation and planning because much of the busy work can be done by an aide. More things can be carried on in the classroom at the same time if an aide is there to assist with one group. Also, class time does not have to be wasted securing and setting up visual aids."

Another teacher: ". . . she releases me for more time to work with students. She gives special help and attention to certain children's needs who would not ordinarily get it in a class of 34. She brings in fresh ideas. She can evaluate children's problems from the angle of a different personality."

Why did the school personnel and officials of the Grand Forks system take on what amounts to considerable extra work for all involved? The answer might best be found in this statement in Mrs. Abbott's four-month progress report:

"The educational philosophy of the Grand Forks Public School District is based upon the assumption that the school should encourage creativity, inquiry, a desire to learn, critical thinking and a search for the truth on the part of its teaching staff as well as the pupils."

RICHARD J. PALMER